

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sakae Takahashi

Sakae Takahashi was born in Makaweli, Kauai, December 8, 1919. He was educated at Waimea High School, the University of Hawai'i, and at Rutgers University in New Jersey. He served in the famed 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during World War II.

Takahashi served as the deputy attorney for the City and County of Honolulu from 1949 to 1950. The following year he entered private practice.

A long-time Democrat, Takahashi was an early John Burns backer until the late 1960s when he became disenchanted and then campaigned for Tom Gill in 1970.

He served on the Honolulu Board of Supervisors in 1951 and resigned the following year. He became the first AJA territorial treasurer when Governor Oren Long appointed him to the position. He served in the territorial senate from 1954 to 1959, and continued serving in the state senate until he retired in 1974. He was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1968.

Tape No. 17-3-1-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sakae Takahashi (ST)

February 18, 1988

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Chris Conybeare (CC) and Daniel W. Tuttle, Jr. (DT)

Joy Chong: The following is tape number one, an interview with Sakae Takahashi. It took place on February 18, 1988. The interviewers are Dan Tuttle and Chris Conybeare. The interview took place at the KHET studios.

CC: Okay, it's February 18, 1988. This is an interview with Sakae Takahashi. It's an interview not for broadcast. It's for scholarly and educational purposes and no broadcast use would be made without Mr. Takahashi's express written consent.

Welcome, I'm glad you could join us today.

ST: Thank you.

CC: I want to, if we can, start where we start with everybody. If you could tell us [about] your own background as a child, and by that I mean a little bit about your parents as well. Where were you born and what were your parents doing at that time?

ST: Well, I was born on the island of Kaua'i in a little town called Makaweli. [December 8, 1919]. It's (now called) Kaumakani, Kaua'i. And my parents, both of them came from Japan, Niigata prefecture in Japan. My dad [Tomonosuke] came to Hawai'i when he was fifteen, sixteen years old, [in the] late (1890s). And my mother [Tori (Takahashi)] came shortly after that. My father—from what I've learned from him—originally worked at O'ahu Sugar [Company], Waipahu, and then subsequently went over to Kaua'i where he worked as a plantation employee for some years before he started his own business. We had a little retail store there.

CC: Which plantation was that?

ST: This was the old Hawaiian Sugar Company, which was subsequently sold to C. Brewer [in 1941] and was renamed Olokele Sugar [Company].

CC: Oh, okay. What do you remember as a kid over there? What was [it] like [in] those days, your growing up there?

ST: Well, I suppose I was like any other plantation kid. I went to grammar school, and then

fortunately, they established the Waimea High School. The legislature gave some money to establish that high school, and I was able to attend Waimea High School. Otherwise, I probably would have quit at eighth grade, because the only other high school on Kaua'i was Kaua'i High School which was forty miles away.

CC: What about Japanese . . .

JC: Stop right there, Chris.

CC: Okay. (Pause)

JC: Okay, continue Chris, please.

CC: Did you also attend Japanese[-language] school? What was the routine?

ST: Well, I attended grammar school in the mornings, and in the afternoon went to Japanese-language school, which was quite a distance from where we lived, but we used to walk to that school. Maybe took us about forty-five minutes to an hour going to this school and forty-five minutes back home. I might just say this, though. Although I may have been a, you know, a normal plantation boy, I did have a father who was rather independent, you know. He started his own business and never believed that he should stay in the plantation too long, although he did live there for some time.

DT: What was the name of this grammar school that you attended?

ST: Makaweli Grammar School . . .

DT: Grammar school. Uh huh.

ST: . . . which was closed, as I understand, last year because the student population had dwindled to a point where it wasn't economical for the state to carry on that grammar school.

DT: Was your father interested in politics at all, or did you get interested in it as a youngster, go to [political] party rallies and that sort of thing?

ST: Well, I can say my father was interested in the betterment of the employees because I recall attending several gatherings where this one rather notorious, as far as the plantation management was concerned, labor union leader used to come around and talk. I did attend some of those meetings with him. You might recall the name Pablo Manlapit [Filipino labor leader of the 1920s].

DT: Oh, for sure.

ST: I can recall one time---and he was only allowed to speak on the highway. He spoke right on the highway. And in one of those rallies, I can recall police bringing some spotlights and then suddenly chasing everybody away from that area. And (my father) and I just ran all the way back to our home because we didn't want to get caught by the police.

(Laughter)

- DT: Was this Manlapit a relative of the later mayor [of Kaua'i, Eduardo Malapit]?
- ST: I'm not sure. I'm not sure, but I think there's some relationship there.
- DT: He [Pablo Manlapit] had helped form the. . . . Well, he's worked with the Filipino Higher Wages Association, was trying to work to unite Filipino and Japanese laborers.
- ST: That's right. Yeah, so I gather my father was a little active, somewhat active in the Japanese labor groups.
- DT: Did your parents speak English? Are they. . . .
- ST: Ah, very little. I know he could write a little bit, but I think his verbal abilities were very limited because, you know, they didn't have a chance to talk to many English-speaking people in the community.
- DT: So basically at home you spoke in Japanese?
- ST: That's right.
- DT: You go to party rallies or any political party functions or . . .
- ST: I can recall early on when Johnny [John H.] Wilson [Democratic mayor of Honolulu] one time came by. He was running for delegate to Congress and in that particular instance, the plantation management allowed him to speak in a camp hall, you know. And I often wondered why he was allowed to do that. And later on when I did get to know Johnny Wilson, I asked him the very question, "How come you were allowed to speak in the plantation halls?"
- And he said, "Well, heck, I knew the Baldwins very well because I helped them build their irrigation system there." I can recall Lincoln McCandless running for delegate to Congress and having a rally right in front of the post office because he wasn't allowed to speak inside the camps.
- CC: Now, they were Democrat? Was it Democrats that weren't [allowed to speak in the camps]?
- ST: That's right. Both Johnny Wilson and Lincoln McCandless were Democrats.
- CC: Republicans, no problem speaking?
- ST: No problem. They got entree to whatever facility was available for rally purposes.
- CC: Now, I've heard stories—and maybe you can verify or not from your own experience—of how the plantation would try to monitor the election activity on the plantation. To your knowledge, did they also try to make sure people, when [they] could vote, that they voted the right way?
- ST: No, I don't recall. I've never seen anything like that because first of all, my parents didn't vote and I was too young to vote. So.

- CC: Okay, just wanted to check because I've heard people tell stories.
- DT: In later years were your parents able to vote after the McCarran Act [in 1952] and as they were elder citizens?
- ST: Well, they didn't because my father never became an American citizen although he had an opportunity to become one.
- CC: How about you and your---you got out of grammar school and went on to high school. Did you have any interest in any kind of political activity?
- ST: Well, yeah, I took part in student activities and student government. At one time I was the chairman of the student council and vice-president of the student organization, [if] my recollection is correct.
- DT: Well, that's where a lot of budding politicians get started is right in high school . . .
- ST: That's right.
- DT: . . . running for public office. Well, then you came over to Honolulu to go to the University of Hawai'i. That was quite a trip in those days, wasn't it?
- ST: It was. I wasn't sure whether I would be going to the university because, well, my father wasn't making too much money. He didn't have the resources to support me, but I applied for a scholarship and I did get a scholarship, a tuition scholarship. So that was the thing that probably clinched my going to the University of Hawai'i.
- DT: You came to the university in what year?
- ST: I came to the university in 1937. And spent four years. Graduated in June 1941. My field of study was agriculture.
- DT: Agriculture? It was not pre-law?
- ST: No.
- DT: Not pre-law.
- ST: And then I started fifth-year work in the fall of 1941. But when the war started, why, I volunteered for active duty, having received my commission from the ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] . . .
- DT: Your fifth-year study was in education or was it still in agriculture?
- ST: In education.
- DT: In education.
- ST: Agricultural education.

- DT: Because you were planning probably to teach agriculture, right?
- ST: That's right, yeah. The number of jobs for agricultural teachers were very limited, though. As I recall, in my class, there were only three of us who were called back for the fifth-year program. So, jobs were very limited.
- CC: Now, you say you actually got your commission prior to the outbreak of the war?
- ST: Yes. I got my commission in June of 1941. But a little later than the regular—my buddies who didn't have any problems with dual citizenship. I was a dual citizen because when I was born, my father registered me with the Japanese consulate, and as a result I was also a Japanese citizen and would have to get through what they call an expatriation process to renounce Japanese citizenship and only until then, until the renunciation, was I able to get my commission.
- DT: While at the University of Hawai'i had you participated in student government activities?
- ST: No, no, I didn't.
- DT: Stuck with—wanting to be a farmer.
- ST: Well, I had to work part-time.
- DT: I figured as much.
- ST: I wouldn't have much time for extracurricular activities.
- CC: Where'd you work?
- ST: I worked at the university farm. And then I worked for Dr. Harry Clements in the botany department. And I also worked for some other professor at the university botany department.
- CC: And you'd been in ROTC then?
- ST: Yes.
- CC: Was it generally encouraged, a young man attending university, to join the ROTC? Was that part of something you just did or did you do it because you wanted to—I mean, was it like peer group pressure or just something that . . .
- ST: Well, I think partly peer group pressure. You know, we had quite a few ag [agriculture] students who were active in ROTC, in advanced ROTC. I think that it's the fact they were active, why, I also joined them. Many of my fellow officers in the 100th [Infantry Battalion], for instance, when the war started, had agricultural backgrounds.
- DT: Pearl Harbor? This is a standard question, I suppose. Where were you when Pearl Harbor happened? It must have been quite a shock even though you were more military-minded than most.

ST: I was doing fifth-year work and doing probationary teaching at 'Aiea Intermediate School.

DT: Oh.

ST: And I lived there. You know, I didn't have a car so I had to live out in 'Aiea. And on the day of December the 7, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, why, I could see everything from my vantage point. In fact, one of the planes, as I understand it, strafed the intermediate school, one of the buildings in [the] intermediate school.

DT: In 'Aiea?

ST: Yeah.

CC: And you told us a little story earlier about what you found yourself doing later that evening.

(Laughter)

ST: Well, after the war started, you know, we got a message on the radio—I got a message on the radio saying, "All university ROTC students, please report to the National Guard Armory," there where the state capitol is now. And I did. And, well, as soon as I got there, they told me to get sworn in as a member of the Hawai'i Territorial Guard. And my assignment was supply officer of the unit there. And the story I told you is about the job I was given. One Nolle Smith [Jr.] and I were given the job of gathering all of the rifles from the various ROTC armories throughout Honolulu—the University of Hawai'i, McKinley High School, Roosevelt [High School], Kamehameha School. And one other school I can't recall. And we did gather all those weapons, and late that night we distributed all of the weapons together with a limited amount of ammunition. And they were issued to all those people who were taken into the Territorial Guard and sent out to the various posts for guard duty. What happened is, after a while, we heard these fellows calling in saying something's wrong with the rifles because they don't fire. Well, we found out that none of the rifles had any firing pins in them. So, subsequently, we had the army get some firing pins for us and we issued the firing pins.

DT: So if there had been an immediate invasion, it would have been embarrassing?

ST: Very embarrassing, yes.

(Laughter)

DT: Incidentally, Nolle Smith was quite a bit older than you are at the time; he'd been at the legislature, hadn't he, by that time?

ST: No.

DT: Was that a bit later?

ST: I'm talking about Nolle Smith, Jr. Junior.

DT: Oh, Nolle Smith, Jr., I see. So his father had been in the legislature, then, I see, uh huh.

Well, okay. That clears that one up. I could visualize that Nolle, Sr. was . . .

ST: Was in the legislature [1929–32], yeah.

DT: He was in the legislature, but he was not in the military . . .

ST: No.

DT: . . . per se, I guess, uh huh. I know I've talked a lot of football stories with him, but I never talked anything about the war so I didn't think that he'd been in there. Well, I suppose the war years, we're going to have to—for purposes of this interview—sort of capsulize those but it stands to reason that you must have gone overseas pretty rapidly. You might give us sort of a brief sketch of the war years. Certainly we don't want to completely overlook that because you were wounded, as I understand, and came back with some stories.

ST: After getting into the [Hawai'i] Territorial Guard, I was, you know, kind of disappointed with the Guard. You know, they were doing nothing but guard duty. So I volunteered for active duty and, fortunately, I got called to active duty by the commanding general [Delos C. Emmons] (of the) Hawaiian Department [of the U.S. Army]—and assigned to Kaua'i. (After) a period of duty there, about five months, then I joined the 100th Battalion. And as you know the 100th went over to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. Later on to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, where we saw the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] unit being organized. But we did go overseas long before they did as a unit. And we joined the Thirty Fourth Division of the Fifth Army and fought in Italy and in France. I got wounded twice. (The first time not too seriously at Lanuvio just before Rome fell.) And then I got back to the unit after I recovered. And in (the) Battle of Biffontaine right outside of Bruyères, France, I got hit again.

DT: Okay, we're going to stop and then change tapes.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: Okay, the following is a continuation of the Sakae Takahashi interview. This is tape number two.

ST: So when I first ran for the state senate [in 1954], one Jim [James W.] Lovell [commanding officer of the 100th Infantry Battalion] . . .

DT: Right, right . . .

ST: Do you remember Jim Lovell?

DT: I remember Jim, sure.

ST: He ran on the Republican ticket with us. And there was conflict among the boys [returning veterans] because they liked him, too. (The vets were in a quandry whether to) support him or support me. And I won, though.

(Laughter)

DT: Yeah.

CC: Before we get back to that, I just want to ask about your military career. Did you experience discrimination because of your ancestry while you were part of the military? Were you conscious of that all the time?

ST: Yeah, there was discrimination but, you know, we were pretty well isolated from other units during training. But, once they got to know you, you know, I think they thought of you as a soldier, an American soldier, rather than a Japanese. I had no trouble.

CC: So I guess maybe discrimination, to some extent, pervaded a lot of things in those days. Oh, even today, to some extent. But you didn't encounter it in any . . .

ST: I didn't encounter any unpleasant incidents, you know, during the time. I can tell you though, (chuckles) there were some incidents which were very humorous and funny. For instance, I was with Daniel Inouye [later senior U.S. senator from Hawai'i] in a hospital in Atlantic City one day, and I said, I told Dan, "Let's go out and have something to eat. Let's go to that Chinese restaurant," near the hotel where we were both recuperating. The hotel had been taken over as a hospital. So we got into this Chinese restaurant and then the owner thought we were Chinese. And we didn't say anything. We ordered a full fare, and by golly, he came to us and spoke Chinese and he says, you know, "I'm going to take the bill."

(Laughter)

ST: Not knowing that we were Americans of Japanese ancestry. It was so funny then. (We) walked out of there (with a), "Thank you."

(Laughter)

DT: A little fringe benefit along the line.

CC: Did you and people like Dan Inouye or others talk about when you came back to Hawai'i what you'd be doing? Was there any talk in those days about coming back to Hawai'i and getting into politics or anything?

ST: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You know, I can say I was very impressed with Roosevelt, President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt. While I was on a troop ship, coming back from France—I had been evacuated as a medical evacuee—and I got kind of a personalized telegram from the president. I suppose he sent those messages to everybody, but I was very impressed. I did do a little bit of studying to find out who this guy was, this great president, and found out that he was a Democrat. And then I decided, well, I'm going to look at what the Democrats have been doing, and I was rather impressed. That's why I said, "I'm going to be a Democrat when I go back."

DT: We got to get that. We got to back up now. Get that on tape.

CC: I just wanted to make sure we got some of that right.

JC: It's rolling, Dan. You can ask these questions, first.

ST: And so, being that impressed. Dan Inouye was a hospital mate of mine. In fact, when all of his surgery was done, in the recuperation period, he and I went to another hotel which was for recuperating patients. He had a bed beside mine for about three months. And we talked about what we're going to do when we get back. Dan Inouye had lost his arm so he wasn't going to be in the army. And I felt that my injuries were severe enough for, I'll get a medical discharge. And so during that period, we did talk a lot about what we're going to do and politics entered our discussions. And I think Dan can confirm that.

DT: You came out as a major out of the war?

ST: When I (was) discharged, yeah, I was a major.

DT: And then later became a colonel in . . .

ST: In the reserves, yeah.

DT: . . . in the reserves. That was one of the highest ranks, was it not—to reiterate—of any Kaua'i soldier.

ST: Yes.

CC: But you came back briefly and then went away to law school or. . . .

ST: Yes, I did. I did go back to law school.

CC: Using the GI benefits to . . .

ST: Mm hmm.

CC: I wondered, 'cause there's Senator Inouye's famous story about trying to become a Republican and not being allowed to be one. You had already decided you're going to be a Democrat?

ST: I decided I'm going to be a Democrat, because as soon as I got out, why, I went to see one Mitsuyuki Kido, somebody I met during the medical leave that I took when I was recuperating in the hospital at Atlantic City. And so after I got discharged, I went to see Mr. Kido, and he said, "You know you want to join the party," and he was one of the most prominent Democrats because he held elective office then [in the territorial house]. He says, "Go see one [Tokuichi] "Dynamite" Takushi and he'll sign you up." And I did go see Takushi. Takushi was the owner of an old secondhand furniture store there on North Beretania Street near 'A'ala Park. And I sat down and talked to him and signed up then.

DT: So this was before you went back to law school, you were already a signed-up Democrat?

ST: No, after I came back.

DT: Oh, after, after you came back from law school [in 1948]?

ST: Yeah, yeah.

DT: Oh, I see. Uh huh.

CC: Basically, you couldn't really become a Republican, anyway, could you, if you had wanted to? Weren't things---now we're told that at that time it wasn't easy for---especially somebody of Japanese ancestry to become a Republican.

ST: That isn't true because some of the people I know, Wilfred Tsukiyama [former territorial senator and supreme court justice] and others, were members of the Republican party. And they were elected officials so I think even then the Republican party members were trying to encourage the returning veterans to join them.

DT: Yeah, Tommy [Thomas T.] Sakakihara I think had been . . .

ST: Yeah. I can recall quite a few of the boys, when I first ran for public office, quite a few of the boys were supporting Republican candidates.

CC: And this is what year then when you first ran?

ST: That was 1950—1949, sorry, yeah, '49 [for the constitutional convention].

DT: Incidentally, were you married on the Mainland or did you meet Bette [Elizabeth (Wulff) Takahashi] on the Mainland and then have her come out here or. . . .

ST: Yeah, I married (her) in New York City . . .

DT: New York City.

ST: I met my wife Bette in New York City while I was on a weekend pass from the hospital.

DT: When you're still in [the] service then, mm hmm?

ST: No, after I—shortly after I got out of [the] service. And I got Dan Inouye to be my best man.

DT: And this was before you had gone to law school, then?

ST: That's right.

DT: I see. So, when you went to law school, she went back to Rutgers with you? Or did she stay . . .

ST: No, we lived in New York City, and I used to commute to Rutgers.

DT: So right after the war, I mean right after law school, you got back, you got active in the party and ended up prosecuting city attorney?

ST: No, in the city and county attorney's office.

DT: The attorney's office, not the prosecuting attorney but the attorney . . .

- ST: Yeah, my boss then was a good Democrat. A fellow named Wilford Godbold. Norman Godbold [Jr.]—his brother—was then commissioner of public lands. Ingram Stainback was the governor, I guess.
- DT: Well, about this time you were back from law school, you had a job. All this while Dan Inouye, as a case in point, was still going to law school, right?
- ST: He was still going to University of Hawai'i, then . . .
- DT: Hawai'i. And then subsequently went to George Washington [University law school].
- ST: . . . went to law school. Yeah.
- DT: Were you talking with Jack Burns or did you have any association, these early associations that Jack Burns used to talk about?
- ST: Yes.
- DT: You sat down with him a lot or is Kido sitting down with him or . . .
- ST: Yeah, well, Kido introduced me to Jack Burns, Jack Kawano, Chuck Mau, Dave [David] Benz (and Dr. Ernest Murai). Those were the fellows who were the active Democrats then. And I can recall, shortly after I joined the party, meeting with these fellows quite often. We had no specific meeting place but usually we ended up, initially, or in the early part, at the old Chun Hoon Pharmacy where they had a garden or a *lānai* there where they serve, you know, coffee and snacks.
- DT: At that time, Jack Burns was quite a conversationalist apparently. What did he do? He had a liquor store in Kailua?
- ST: He had a little liquor store there in Kailua on Oneawa Street. And beside him, there was a fellow named Godfrey Affonso, another very strong, active Democrat.
- DT: Well, could it be that since Kido was a former schoolteacher, right, I remember he was a schoolteacher at the time, could it be that maybe he had a hand in recruiting Jack Burns rather than the other way around as so often [is] told?
- ST: It could be because, you know, I really never found out how Jack Burns ever became a Democrat. You know his brother [Edward] was a Republican and very, very close (to Jack). So, I don't recall ever hearing how he ever became a member of the party, but it could have been that Mr. Kido might have been the one who influenced him to become a Democrat.
- DT: Because in his own way, Jack Burns was not that big an organizer. He did it in very small groups and very, sort of coffee klatches rather than making speeches or anything of that sort as I recall. So, it's very possible that people such as Mr. Kido actually recruited and pulled Jack Burns into the business of politics.
- ST: Yeah, it could have been that way.

- DT: You know of anyone who would know about these years and could remember all the years about who . . .
- ST: Maybe, the only one I can think of today would be Chuck Mau because Chuck Mau was a very active politician then. And if Jack Kawano is around, he would probably be able to give you that information. Those were the fellows who were very active then.
- CC: When you fellows would get together at these—and it sounds fairly informal, I mean you would meet at a certain place and talk story. Did you decide that so-and-so should run for this and you were going to go for con-con [constitutional convention]? Or how did you decide to run for office the very first time?
- ST: The con-con, running for the con-con, I ran for that particular convention in 1952.
- DT: Nineteen fifty, wasn't it?
- ST: Fifty, yes.
- DT: Or '49, maybe it was even '49.
- ST: Yeah, the election was in '49. The convention was in 1950.
- DT: That's right, that's right.
- ST: I did run for that convention, but not on the basis of what these fellows were trying to tell me to do, to run for this convention. But, when I was going to law school, New Jersey had a constitutional convention and some of the members of our class were very active in the con-con race there and campaigning for that convention. I did take part in some of their activities. And you know, when the Hawai'i convention was organized, they actually used the New Jersey constitution as a model, I believe, somewhat of a model for the Hawai'i constitution.
- DT: Well, it had been newly revamped, so they naturally looked at the new conventions that had been [held].
- ST: So, with that background, I said, "Well, I'll take a chance. I'll run for the convention." And I did seek the support of all these fellows who were, you know, part of that group.
- DT: You came reasonably close, didn't you? This was done in small districts, however.
- ST: Yeah, I think I ran ahead of Harriet Bouslog [attorney for the ILWU], and I was the next, if. . . . I don't know who actually ran, except Fred Ohrt, I recall very clearly. But I wasn't too far behind from winning a seat.
- DT: You mentioned a name right there, the name of Fred [Frederick] Ohrt, who sort of fits into the folklore of Hawaiian politics. He was a---you want to talk and tell us a little bit of Fred Ohrt. I remember him simply from the board of water supply.
- ST: Fred Ohrt was a chief engineer of the Board of Water Supply of the City and County of Honolulu. And he was a very powerful politician who stood in the background. I think he was

one of the organizers of the HGEA [Hawai'i Government Employees' Association], and he was one of the leading lights of that organization. And they played very actively, active politics. They supported Johnny Wilson, for instance, you know, who ran for mayor several times and got elected mayor on two [six] occasions, I guess. And Fred Ohrt in the constitutional convention came out in the open and did run for that convention delegate's position. And he was strong, very strong.

DT: He never really committed himself, did he, to either political party? I suppose his association would seem more Democratic, but he was sort of a . . .

ST: I'm not sure his association was mostly Democratic. He had friends all over the place. And I never knew whether he was a Democrat or Republican. I'd be inclined to say that he was more of a Republican.

DT: That would fit in with the times, at least up to this point. And the board of water supply, in essence, was sort of an autonomous agency. It was what we'd almost, in those days I think, called an untouchable, is that correct, as you remember?

ST: That's right. But they had a lot of influence, the fellows who were at the board of water supply.

DT: How did you get into your first race for elected office? Do you remember how you decided to do that?

ST: After the con-con race which I lost, a lot of people encouraged me to go run for public office. And at that time, there was a group who urged me to run for the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of Honolulu [predecessor to the city council] and I finally decided I would run as a Democrat. And I did run and got elected [in 1950].

DT: So, you were running at-large in those days, were you?

ST: Yes, from the whole island.

DT: So that got you into the swing of things very early?

ST: Yeah, I got to know Mayor Wilson very well, Noble Kauhane and some of the people who were on the board of supervisors for many years.

DT: We're about to go, but how well did you do in that election?

ST: I did very well. I don't think I was the low man on the totem pole of those who got elected.

CC: Okay, we'll stop there and take another break.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is a continuation of the Takahashi interview. This is tape number three.

DT: You spent just about one year or so on the board of supervisors. Anything memorable about

that year or so? Or was it fairly routine?

ST: That was a fairly routine year, though Johnny Wilson was the mayor and, you know, he was not in good health, so part of the time he spent up at Maluhia Home [the state convalescent hospital], and we used to go up and talk to him a lot. I found out that this fellow had a--- that's when I asked him about, "How come you were allowed to enter the plantation and be allowed to campaign?" And he told me that he was the engineer for the irrigation project on an A&B [Alexander and Baldwin] plantation.

DT: But things were happening in the Democratic party. For example, a young fellow named Frank Fasi had hit the territory during World War II and had returned. And coming up to the '52 election this was the first time he challenged Johnny Wilson, wasn't it?

ST: Yes, and I think he, Frank, got beaten pretty badly the first time around.

DT: That's right. That's right. He was.

ST: I actively campaigned for Johnny Wilson even though I was not on the board of supervisors.

DT: By this time you had another political job, didn't you?

ST: Yeah.

DT: You were rising in the field of politics.

ST: And in 1951, excuse me, '52, Oren Long became governor, or was the governor then. And he asked me to join his cabinet as the treasurer of the territory of Hawai'i.

DT: And this was the highest political office that any AJA [American of Japanese ancestry] had held up to this time, is that not correct?

ST: Yeah, that's correct.

DT: So you were a trailblazer here?

ST: Yeah, and I was pretty young, too. I was thirty-two so I can say that I was the youngest of all the cabinet members in his cabinet.

DT: Little did you realize that you were just on the edge of a very climactic career in 1954.

ST: Yes.

DT: You recall anything about your experiences as a territorial treasurer?

ST: Well, the treasurer's job was pretty routine but I think the leaders of the Democratic party felt that they wanted someone of Japanese extraction there to kind of, you know, symbolize that here the Democratic party was willing to have people of all races become leaders in the government. Well, I was happy to serve in that position.

DT: But you just barely settled into that position when all of a sudden things happened on the Mainland and a popular general got elected president of the United States [in 1952] and that had its effect on Oren Long as governor, didn't it?

ST: That's right. President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower got elected by a wide margin over Adlai Stevenson, who I thought might have been the better president, but the result was I had to resign that position because they appointed a new governor in place of Oren Long. [Democrat Long was replaced by Republican Samuel Wilder King.] And so for about a year, we were not too active in politics. But then we were preparing for the next election which was 1954.

DT: Yeah, but you had set up a law office, had you not . . .

ST: Yes, I did.

DT: . . . in the meantime on that. Incidentally, to do a little flashback, the Democrats had some power in the legislature prior to the 1954 election. Do you recall anything about the coalition that brought [Hiram] Fong into the speakership or were you out of the territory at the time, or not?

ST: Yeah, I think the minority Democrats in the house supported Hiram Fong—[Charles] Charlie Kauhane [later speaker of the house], Mits Kido, those people—and were able to wrest the power of the house away from the people who backed [D.] Hebden Porteus.

DT: So this was Fong, sort of a local boy, against Porteus who had been born in Australia, I guess.

ST: That's right, yeah.

DT: So, but you weren't that active in politics or hadn't been put in office at the time.

ST: Not, not---I had nothing to do with that.

DT: And of course that was, you were in the senate beginning . . .

ST: Nineteen fifty-four.

DT: Fifty-four.

ST: Well, we got elected in '54 . . .

DT: Fong---[you] got elected in 1954, so, . . .

ST: . . . so, the '55 session.

DT: . . . you never had any way of really learning about past house history, as such, I guess.

ST: No.

DT: Well, what about this '54 campaign. I remember that.

CC: Yeah, I'm ready to move to that.

DT: That's the big excitement, shall we say.

ST: Well, the '54 campaign I would say was, oh I can say it was pretty well organized. And long before the election started, we were really working very hard to get people to run for office. And we put up a pretty formidable slate of people.

DT: Well, you had organizers behind the scene, organizers like Bob [Robert G.] Dodge.

ST: Bob Dodge.

DT: Tom [Thomas P.] Gill.

ST: Tom Gill was very active on the county committee [chair of county committee 1954–58].

DT: Patsy Mink. These were people who did not run in '54.

ST: That's right, yeah. And the people who, well, Judge [William H.] Heen was active in his own way. The Heen brothers, you know, Ernest Heen was active. All of the fellows were active. There was a kind of a dissident faction there that—[the] so-called [Ingram] Stainback group—who didn't, you know, really give us the support that they should have given us. But, despite them, we were able to organize a very formidable campaign.

DT: Were you participate . . .

CC: I'd like to go back to one thing.

DT: Sure.

CC: Because one of Stainback's nemesis over the years had been a fellow by the name of Jack Hall [regional director of the ILWU]. And the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union], obviously, had by this point had started to become a factor in political matters. What was the relationship of the ILWU and the 1954 campaign? Do you remember?

ST: Well, the ILWU had actually joined the Democratic party although, you know, there was no open alliance between the ILWU and the Democratic party. The members of the ILWU, people like [Hideo] "Major" Okada in Waipahu, [Tadashi] "Castner" Ogawa, Newton Miyagi, very strong and active members of the ILWU, were supporting the slate of Democrats that were put up for that particular election, especially in the Fifth District.

DT: Well, this had been laid to rest, had it not, in the '52 [1950] state or territorial convention of the Democratic party?

ST: Yes.

DT: Where the factions, the ILWU factions on one hand and. . . . Did you participate in that? Did you consider yourself a member of either faction or were you a strong one . . .

ST: I was already in the Burns faction.

DT: You were already in the Burns faction.

ST: In fact, if you'll look at a . . . If you go back to—I haven't seen it for a long time, maybe I've got a copy of it—but the *Honolulu Advertiser* had a photograph of the walkout in that Democratic convention there [in 1950]. There I stood on the front row with Harriet Bouslog on my side who represented the ILWU as their attorney, and several of the other familiar faces. And . . .

DT: But Burns, the Burns faction at that time was sort of a mediating factor, was it not? It wasn't formally part of the ILWU faction, was it?

ST: No.

DT: I think that should be made clear.

ST: I think what they really wanted to do was to get the support of the ILWU but did not want to have the ILWU be considered a part of the Democratic party.

DT: Or to take over the party.

ST: That's right.

DT: Some people were alleging . . .

ST: Or let them dictate to the party. So there was that fine line and I think Jack Burns had a lot to do in trying to keep that distinction.

CC: Was there also some of that spillover from the red scare? Was that affecting people's attitudes towards the ILWU, the Communist . . .

ST: Very definitely. I can recall in that election of '54. I ran from, well, I ran island-wide in that particular election. And in Kāne'ohe, one of the fellows who was a fellow veteran who was supporting me, he called me and said, "Hey, I understand that you're a Communist."

And I said, "Whoever told you that?"

He says, "Well, that's the word that's going around in this whole district."

And I told him not to worry about it. You know what I did though, I called Farrant Turner [organizer of the 100th Infantry Battalion, and director of IMUA] and asked him to talk to some people there in Kāne'ohe to tell them that this fellow was no Communist. And Farrant Turner did.

DT: He did, even as a Republican. He was several years later, a Republican.

ST: Well, he was not clearly identified as a Republican then.

DT: And probably not until he actually ran for office [in 1958] . . .

ST: That's right.

DT: . . . I suppose, or until he was secretary of the territory [1953].

ST: That's right.

CC: Anyway, Dan, go ahead. I just wanted [to] get back and get a hold of that.

DT: Well, you did have ILWU backing, though, I think in '54 when you ran, didn't you?

ST: Yes, they supported me. Yeah.

DT: Did they support you openly or covertly or both?

ST: Openly and covertly, of course.

DT: Oh.

ST: We used to go to all these rallies that were held in ILWU precincts and in their union halls.

DT: So you went to the ILWU, ILWU vote, in those areas. But you also went all over the island of O'ahu, did you not?

ST: That's right.

DT: 'Cause you were running island-wide for the territorial senate.

ST: Yes.

DT: Now that's something that's really interesting and a lot of people don't even understand today, the significance of these rallies. Could you describe these rallies and then I want to ask you about one in particular.

ST: Well, the rallies, in those days, you know, we didn't have television, and radio advertising was pretty expensive. So, most of our campaigning was done in various communities. We held rallies on schedule. The rallies were pretty good places for people to come and hear the candidates.

DT: These were held in schools or in parks . . .

ST: In schools and in parks, yeah.

DT: . . . and all the kids would come out in the evening in their night clothes all dressed for bed, right? Did you ever notice what was happening in the audience? Maybe since I was in the audience, why, but they would eat cotton candy and . . .

ST: The rallies were very interesting. In some places they had a lot of food, a lot of

entertainment, and then the speeches would be interspersed between the entertainment. They were really gala affairs, the real good rallies. And I think the Democratic party did a good job in whipping up interest in these rallies.

DT: And this was probably the first time that the Democrats had really had comprehensive coverage of the islands, this island at any rate, with their party rallies.

ST: Yeah, that's right.

CC: You were leading up to one particular. . . .

DT: Well, that's right, that's right. If I remember correctly, you were on the platform the night of the now rather famous 'Āina Haina Debates, so-called because the Democrats had been urging the Republicans to debate and the Republicans, they'd had meetings about this. They broke up, they couldn't agree. And, there'd been a lot of talk about a pre-election debate and nothing seemed to happen, and yet you went out to a party rally in 'Āina Haina, at the 'Āina Haina School, which was [a] fairly new school at the time. And then something happened. Why don't you pick it up from there and tell it in your own words.

ST: What we did was, we bought some radio time for a change [on station KIKI]. This was one of the big rallies that we had planned in advance. And we had empty seats on the platform and when we got on it, I understand most of the candidates who spoke would look at the seats and say, "Where are the Republicans? We challenged them to a debate and they haven't shown up." And when it was my turn to talk, why, I was reading a portion of the revised statute. As I recall, I was criticizing the fact that our insurance code---being the former treasurer of the territory, I was very interested in revising our insurance laws. And I was reading a portion of the insurance code, which was, at that time, very, very skimpy. We needed a comprehensive code. And my subject was these Republicans who controlled the legislature were never interested in that code because they could do whatever they pleased as far as [the] insurance industry is concerned. It was totally unregulated. And despite the fact that there was a Supreme Court decision which had affected the insurance industry in the United States, Hawai'i was so backward. And then all of a sudden I saw Hiram Fong (chuckles) enter and then Hebden Porteus behind him. And the whole slew of . . .

DT: Republicans.

ST: . . . Republican candidates came up to the stand and sat down and said, "Okay, when you're through, it's our turn (chuckles)." And they did get up and talk. It was fun.

DT: It was fun and Dan Inouye got a little bit annoyed because one of the big issues at the time was communism, was it not?

ST: That's right, yeah.

DT: And Dan sort of felt that they had overstepped their bounds of accusing the Democrats of being pinks or reds or soft on communism.

ST: Danny got up and really took them to task. I think if you say who won the debate, I think we won the debate.

- DT: Well, I guess you really felt that way because didn't you do something the next night? You reran the tape of the broadcast so that everybody could hear it after it made headlines in the newspaper, and so . . .
- ST: I think the party leaders decided to rerun the tape over the radio. Some radio stations. And it was, I think, a big boost. The debate actually was a big boost for us.
- DT: Anyway, a lot of people feel that this may have been the turning point. It's difficult to tell about such a thing but it may have been one of the turning points, at any rate, of the '54 election, this 'Āina Haina debate.
- ST: Dan, I felt that we were going to win the election even before the 'Āina Haina [debate]. I had the feeling that, you know, there was going to be a big, big upset here in Hawai'i.
- DT: Well, you were one of the very few then because I think the magnitude—not the fact that some offices were won—but the magnitude of the victory of the Democrats that year really caught most people by surprise. A lot of people who were running for public office. . . . I can remember chatting with Masato Doi [who was elected to the territorial house] the morning after the election. He said, "I didn't think I'd get elected. What am I going to do now?" because he had a young family and he was just starting on his law practice, he being somewhat younger than you were. And so this was really a. . . . In the senate races, you captured—Hiram Fong [who had been speaker of the house] was no longer a senator after that election, was he?
- ST: No, no. Hiram was running for the house.
- DT: Oh, he was running for the house, but he was no longer in the house . . .
- ST: No.
- DT: . . . after that?
- ST: Yeah.
- DT: He lost, too. How many won for the senate at that time?
- ST: Well, you know . . .
- DT: You won and how many others?
- ST: Myself and Judge, Judge [William] Heen. There were only three candidates, or three seats open island-wide. [ST and William Heen, both Democrats, and Wilfred Tsukiyama, a Republican, won the senate race in the Third District, O'ahu.] And as I recall, the only one that lost was Judge [Delbert] Metzger.
- DT: [The only one] of the Democrats.
- ST: Yeah.

DT: So you won all except one seat, and Hiram Fong was defeated [in the house of representatives, Fifth District]. And I think only one [Republican] survived in the old [house] Fourth District and that was Hebden Porteus. We'll pick it up there after we take a little break.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is tape number four, continuation of interview with Sakae Takahashi.

DT: Put simply, Senator, the 1954 election results were a complete Democratic sweep. For the first time in the history of the territory of Hawai'i, Democrats had control of the legislature. They didn't win the mayor's race in Honolulu [where Neal Blaisdell beat Frank Fasi] and they didn't win the delegate to Congress race [where Elizabeth Farrington beat John Burns], but they swept the legislature, both houses. And what to many—maybe not to you—but to many was a complete surprise that the Democrats never having had control before was suddenly in power. You recall that election night? Where were you and what happened when you—you must have done a little celebrating.

ST: Chee, I, chee, let me think. I wasn't one who really cared about celebrating. What I used to do is to go to my headquarters and then just talk to our fellow workers and then go back home and go to sleep. And in those days, you know, radio was in use but television (was not).

DT: Radio. Television was only a few people during that campaign . . .

ST: That's right.

DT: . . . used television, Frank Fasi most notable, I guess. Neal Blaisdell used some television. But only the top races. A few Democratic party forums, I believe, were on television, right?

ST: First of all, we couldn't afford television.

DT: That's right. That's right.

ST: And we used radio, but the party had to really scrounge for money to get programs over radio. I remember one rally that we had at Ala Moana Park. We had a talkathon but we used a radio station that had [a] very small audience.

DT: I think it was radio station KIKI, wasn't it?

ST: KIKI, that's right. And I remember one Angelo Rossi who was the manager of that.

DT: Right.

ST: Who gave us a break. That's why we used KIKI.

DT: I think that's the station used for the 'Āina Haina debate, too, . . .

ST: That's right.

- DT: . . . incidentally, I believe. Well, there were celebrations. The Democrats had their first attempt at power, really, in the territory of Hawai'i. As I recall, the 1955 session was really quite tumultuous.
- ST: It was, yes.
- DT: In itself and its relations with the Republican governor, Samuel Wilder King, who had been appointed by Eisenhower. You want to pick it up from there and talk about that '55 session?
- ST: Well, the '55 session, it was a real landmark session. We introduced a lot of bills, bills which are still on the books today. And as I recall, there were quite a few bills which were sent to the governor and either he vetoed them directly or let them die. In those days, if a bill wasn't signed, it automatically went dead. One of the bills that I was particularly involved in was the so-called bill to provide unemployment compensation for agricultural workers. In that particular session, we had some real problems because the actuary hired by the employers stated that if the bill is enacted in its form then, why, it would deplete our unemployment trust funds to a point where that program would be useless. So we deferred action on that particular bill. And my personal experience was that the ILWU got quite angry at me and Nelson Doi and some of the others who were in the senate.
- DT: So they stepped back and they withdrew their backing from you over there?
- ST: Well, that's why, in the subsequent election in 1958, they really took off after me, and [Representative] George Ariyoshi who happened to go along with us, and [Senator] Nelson Doi. And [Representative] Steere Noda. Four of us. I could still see the kind of literature that they passed out advocating the defeat of our [re]election.
- DT: But they stayed angry at you, or didn't they, or didn't stay so angry at Ariyoshi.
- ST: Well, they stayed angry at Ariyoshi until later, of course.
- DT: Until he became governor [acting governor in 1973, governor in 1974].
- ST: Yeah.
- DT: Uh huh. Well, there was also some confusion in the house. I don't know how much you observed it, but as I recall, the session was really most stormy in '55 in the house of representatives. Do you remember that one involving Charlie Kauhane and some of your young Democratic colleagues? Do you have any comments about that?
- ST: Yeah, I remember very distinctly that Charlie [Charles E.] Kauhane was a real power there. He formed a coalition and got the speakership, and the only way that some of the house members could get anything out of Charlie Kauhane was to come over to the senate side and ask us to go to Charlie and bargain with him. I can recall going back and forth between the senate and the house to bargain with Charlie on several major bills where Charlie took the position that no bill introduced by some of these dissidents in the house would ever pass over me and we had to really go over and beg, and . . .
- CC: Who was the coalition with, that Charlie Kauhane formed? Who did he form the coalition

with?

ST: Well, he had the neighbor island house members and some of the Republicans. People like Joe [Joseph] Garcia, I think, supported him.

DT: It really wasn't a formal coalition. I think all of the. . . . He ended up, didn't he, with the Democrats supporting him as such.

ST: Yeah, but he had . . .

DT: He had some Republicans for some votes. It wasn't a formal coalition like [Hiram] Fong or [Elmer] Cravalho, is that not correct?

ST: Well, take Representative Fukushima. Yasutaka Fukushima. He was very close to Charles Kauhane. And Fuku, I think, had quite an influence on some of the legislation.

CC: But the Republicans didn't end up with the chairmanships and that . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

CC: But the Republicans didn't end up with chairmanships and that sort of thing, did they?

ST: No, no.

DT: It was mostly a battle between Dan Inouye and company and Charlie Kauhane because Kauhane was hurling charges of Diet and Tokyo and that sort of thing.

ST: That's right. When it came to very crucial votes, though, he had to count on the Republicans. So, . . .

CC: It might not have been formal, but certainly the Republicans were part of it, in terms of his own . . .

DT: That's right, that's right. It was an informal thing more of . . .

CC: Just wanted to clear that up because . . .

DT: Sure, sure, because I think it's very important . . .

ST: It's not a formal coalition, no. But I think he could count on the Republican votes whenever the chips were down.

DT: But in the house by 1956 what had happened? (Chuckles)

ST: Well, then, you know, 1956 [election] the picture changed.

- DT: They dumped Kauhane . . .
- ST: That's right and got Elmer Cravalho in, and as you know, Elmer was, well, the real power then in the house for many years.
- DT: But he became—but this leads up to another coalition in '59. Now this was a Republican-Democratic coalition, wasn't it?
- ST: Mm hmm.
- DT: In '59.
- ST: That's right.
- DT: And that's the one that brought Elmer to power [as speaker], but you weren't involved in that very much, were you?
- ST: No, that was really a battle in the house. You know, whenever we [in the senate] try to intervene, why, they'll tell us to stay away from them, you know. Our side. "You stay on your side, we'll stay on our side."
- CC: What about within the party, though, in terms of Democrats seeing this coalition formed with Republicans? Did it cause problems within the party?
- ST: Well, they expressed concern, but I don't think they could do much.
- DT: It meant the end of the [O. Vincent] Esposito political career, didn't it? Tom Gill survived because Cravalho sort of brought him into the . . .
- ST: That's right.
- DT: . . . into the fold after that. But it really meant the end of Vince Esposito.
- ST: In the house.
- DT: In the house.
- ST: So, Vince, subsequently decided to run for the senate.
- DT: Senate, and stayed there for a while [1960–66] and then sort of disappeared.
- ST: That's right.
- CC: But basically the Democratic party wasn't able to impose some kind of discipline. It didn't work that way. It couldn't. The party wasn't able to impose. . . .
- ST: Well, Jack Burns was pretty much the man who was, you know, the leader of the Democratic party, and I don't think it was in the nature of Jack Burns to tell the members of the house how to run their house. I don't think he used the Democratic party as a whip to keep these

fellows in line, no.

DT: The people . . .

ST: Jack was primarily interested in legislation, and if he felt that, you know, some good was coming out of the legislature in the form of legislation, he was satisfied.

DT: The people that were really hurt out of that coalition were probably the Gill forces, and they were not about to become anything other than Democrats as such, . . .

ST: That's right.

DT: . . . even though [they] had suffered a setback. But I guess when all is said and done, the big topic during the years '54 to '59 was the statehood issue, was it not?

ST: Well, yeah, we were all pressing for statehood in one form or the other. I can recall delegations being sent to Washington and resolutions being passed expressing support for statehood.

DT: It meant a new electoral situation for you, too, didn't it?

ST: Yes, once we became a state, you know, our constitution, which was adopted in 1952, came into effect. And that meant that our districts were reapportioned from the old districts. My senatorial district was actually reduced in size to one-half of O'ahu, more or less. And then in subsequent reapportionments, why, you know, it became smaller.

DT: Even smaller.

ST: Even smaller, yes.

DT: I guess the first reapportionment was in '58, before that election, and then that held over into statehood . . .

ST: Yes.

DT: . . . because the legislature was enlarged. After statehood, you didn't really serve—you weren't on [the] statehood commission, were you, or anything like that . . .

ST: No, no, no.

DT: You were not active in the statehood movement.

ST: No, I was not on any of the commissions, no.

DT: Mm hmm. However, in '59, some bad things happened to the Democratic party, didn't it?

ST: In the first statehood election, yeah. We lost the governorship [where William Quinn beat John Burns] and we lost control of the senate. The senate, you know, under the territorial setup, under the Organic Act, there were only fifteen members. In the state constitution,

which went into effect in 1959, the senate is enlarged to twenty-five members, and districts were reapportioned. For the first time, though, O'ahu had more members in the senate than the neighbor islands. You know, before statehood, the numbers were nine neighbor islands, six O'ahu. After statehood, why, we outnumbered the neighbor islands by, I think, fifteen to ten. [The number of senators increased to twenty-five during the 1958 territorial election, with the Republicans in the majority. After the first statehood election in 1959, Republicans still outnumbered Democrats fourteen to eleven, and the neighbor islands held fifteen seats verses ten held by O'ahu. Not until 1967 did O'ahu senators outnumber neighbor island senators.]

- DT: Now something like that because—this was the result of a U.S. Supreme Court's one-man-one-vote decision [Baker vs. Carr in 1962], was it not?
- ST: That's right, yeah.
- CC: What caused, in your mind, the Republicans to do so well in terms of the governor's race and the senate? How did they pull it off?
- ST: The governorship race . . .
- CC: Yeah.
- ST: . . . and the senate race? I think I can say that part of the cause was the fact that Jack Burns really didn't start his campaigning until very late. He stayed in Washington, as I recall. [John "Jack" Burns was delegate to Congress at the time.] And secondly, his decision to run for governor, you know, was very belated, too. And they had a very, very attractive candidate, Bill [William F.] Quinn [who had been appointed governor of the territory since 1957].
- DT: I know the Democrats complain he [Quinn] sang the "Hawaiian Wedding Song" too well or something like that (chuckles).
- ST: Bill Quinn was very active. A very attractive candidate. People had a lot of respect for Jack Burns, but I think if you put them side by side, Bill was a more attractive candidate.
- CC: Did Burns not---was he not able to capitalize on the statehood success, or because he came back so late, or did people just feel it was going to happen anyway and didn't really credit him with it?
- ST: I'm not quite sure why he delayed his return, you know, to start campaigning for the governorship. But I think that there was some feeling that maybe he didn't care. I don't know.
- CC: Or maybe he thought it would be easier than it was?
- ST: Yeah, that's right.
- DT: You know there's some feeling in some quarters that, at least I guess Burns himself has expressed it, that he really wanted to run for the U.S. Senate but he got locked into the position of running for governor. And he got started late and his heart really wasn't in it. Do you think that might have been true, or not?

ST: It could have been. I've never heard that before, but I can understand that statement you made right now, Dan, because he had a lot of respect and admiration for the Senate as a body. He used to talk about the Senate, as I recall, as being the most exclusive political organization in the world. And I think that kind of thinking was kind of influenced by his closeness to Lyndon Johnson.

DT: In any event, you won in 1959—picking up with your own political career and not the others—you won in '59 and you stayed in the state senate until nineteen-seventy- . . .

ST: Four.

DT: . . . four. Mm hmm. And meanwhile, you became active in the gubernatorial races, did you not? I think you . . .

ST: I got involved in . . .

DT: . . . sort of surprised some people. You backed Tom Gill, right?

ST: I got involved in the Tom Gill campaign in 1970 and 1974 [in the Democratic primary race for governor]. Not too much in '70 [against Jack Burns] but very active in the '74 campaign [against George Ariyoshi].

DT: Did you sort of feel that two terms was enough?

ST: I felt that way and I thought that Jack Burns would, you know, not run for a third term. He did, though.

CC: You seem to be saying—oh, I don't know, correct me if I'm wrong, but at least just looking over some old newspaper clippings—that perhaps the Democratic party was forgetting some of the things it had taught people and wasn't being open to new voices and to young people and things like that. Was that how you felt?

ST: That's very true. I felt that we were getting stale. We had lost some of our idealism, and some of the, you know, the groups in the community who supported the Burns administration were not the kind of groups that should be supporting him. I was specifically referring to the very strong construction industry groups and the developers. I thought that they had too much self-interest in the election of Jack Burns and the people around him.

CC: So that was also part of your decision for backing Tom Gill, then?

ST: That was probably the principal reason why I shifted.

CC: Okay, why don't we stop here. We're going to change tapes.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is tape number five, continuation of interview with Sakae Takahashi. This is the last tape of the interview.

ST: The break really came . . .

DT: Maybe we better hold it just a minute.

CC: That's fine, go.

DT: Go.

CC: Yeah, the break really came.

DT: Go ahead, the break came when. . . .

ST: The break really came when I felt that the people in certain industries in this community were having too much influence on the governor as well as the people around him. And most of them were people in the construction industry and the developers. And they had a lot of money to support him in the campaign.

DT: Well, the Burns people had often alleged that there was something—and I never got the straight story out of this—alleged something on the part of [Mitsuyuki] Kido, or perhaps even you, that had gone contrary to what the governor wanted or something, or that he turned down a development that Kido wanted. Is there any truth to that or. . . .

ST: I don't know anything about that particular story.

DT: I never talked with you about it before, but.

ST: But Kido stuck with Burns. Kido was kind of destroyed because I had broken away from the Burns faction.

DT: Oh, Kido did remain loyal to Burns . . .

ST: Oh, yeah.

DT: . . . all the way up till the end, then.

ST: That's right.

DT: I see.

CC: So this really meant a break with Kido, who is kind of your initial . . .

ST: No, we remained very close friends, you know, but he never brought up the subject after the break.

CC: Let me get back to your—it's sort of tied in, your interest [in] ethics and campaign spending law and that kind of thing. What was your motive there? What were your feelings about that, that led to your interest in it?

ST: I've always felt that we should have a strong ethics law and I always felt that there should be

a reform in our election laws. I can recall the 1970 amendment where we were trying to limit spending by candidates, and there was a provision in the law that said that any campaign contribution to any candidate over \$100 should be reported to the election commission. Well, it came out of committee in good shape, but then when it got to the floor, the bill got to the floor, why, one of the senators who [was] very close to Burns put in an amendment saying that the law shall become effective only after the 1970 election. So, there was---and then the amendment passed by a big majority. Even some of our own senators were very squeamish about reporting campaign contributions so the amendment passed very easily. And in effect, what it did was, it delayed disclosures until the next election.

CC: Didn't you run into some trouble with your own colleagues over your position on ethics? Didn't they actually break up one of your hearings or something? Or they conveniently didn't appear or something?

ST: Oh, yeah, that was on the collective bargaining [for public employees] bill. I called a meeting one afternoon because we were anxious to have the thing go through, and these fellows were attending some kind of a rally for one of the senators or a fund-raiser for one of the senators . . .

DT: This had to do with the ethics committee, wasn't it? There was the ethics committee where you scheduled a meeting and had television cameras there and everything and they went to a fund-raising committee for, who was it, Dave [David] McClung [then senate president] or somebody.

ST: No, Bob [Robert] Taira.

DT: Bob Taira, okay.

ST: That's right, that's right, yeah.

DT: Yeah, yeah, I think so.

CC: There was an ethics---I mean, they actually set it up over an ethics matter . . .

ST: And I know Reverend [Claude] Du Teil was very angry because Jim [James] Clark, who was supposed to be a member of my committee, didn't show up and left a note under Jimmy's door, you know. And Jimmy came rushing back to me the next day and saying, "Hey, you shouldn't do those things when you know that there was going to be a fund-raiser for one of our fellow colleagues."

My feeling was, "Look, I set the schedule some time ago and you folks, if you don't want to attend the meetings, that's your business, but I'm going to continue to hold these hearings."

DT: Well, you were disturbed about it and rightly so because it really showed a certain amount of disrespect for the committee chairman. I think you had that in mind more than just being personally embarrassed. You felt that it was showing disrespect to the senate.

ST: The three of them who were on the committee who didn't attend the meeting held a press conference, I think (chuckles), the next day, and accused me of practicing law while I was in

the senate, spending a lot of time doing my own personal legal work, which is not true.

CC: But somehow, this ethics committee matter did get tied up with your position on collective bargaining, too, right? I mean, you remembered it that way originally, but didn't you bring the collective bargaining thing out?

ST: Yeah, Dan Tuttle is very familiar (DT chuckles) with the collective bargaining bill.

DT: Yeah.

ST: We worked on the bill—actually, I got permission from the members of the committee to draft the bill and I did draft the bill. I spent a lot of time on it prior to the session. And when the session started, why, we introduced a short form bill or a bill that had to be filled out and actually with the work that we did in the pre-session, we were able to come out with a pretty good bill. But this is one thing that I might just mention, the HGEA never supported the bill.

DT: Never supported.

ST: Yeah, contrary to what they might say. I never saw David Trask [head of the HGEA] around telling me to go push this bill.

DT: Yeah, you told me in January of 1970, that was [at] Prince Kūhiō Restaurant where we met at the time, that the major unions—and here I was then with the Hawai'i Educational Association—that much to my surprise the major unions had actually been opposed to collective bargaining but were telling their own members that they wanted it, but they would tell the legislators, "It's too early. Wait till next session. Wait till next session."

CC: Well, one clarification, about public employee collective . . .

DT: Right.

CC: . . . bargaining.

DT: Right.

CC: Obviously, the private sector had . . .

DT: Well, of course, this was public service.

ST: Well, no, that isn't true, Dan, totally true. I think the UPW [United Public Workers] was interested in the bill.

DT: They had mingled feelings. They were . . .

ST: That's right.

DT: . . . one way or another.

ST: And I can recall both Henry Epstein [then state director of the UPW] and Gary Rodrigues,

the present union leader, came into my office and talked about the bill, and actually, they did testify before the committee. The others were either lukewarm or they showed very little interest. One nonpublic union leader supported the bill very strongly and that is [Walter] Kupau [of the Carpenters' Union, AFL-CIO]. Kupau saw some merit in the bill. He said, "You know, I like this bill." And he gave us pretty good support.

CC: The ILWU didn't support it either, did they, or did they?

ST: ILWU wasn't around, as I recall.

DT: Yeah, now you put me on the spot, Senator, you said, "What are you going to do," you know, "with HEA [Hawai'i Educational Association]?" And I told you that it was the number one item on our legislative platform and that we would go with a product.

CC: But after you brought it out, they kind of had their support, didn't they, publicly, I mean, they couldn't . . .

ST: Well, yeah, because they liked the bill. They really liked the bill, but. . . . They finally agreed to support it. But support from the HGEA was very lukewarm after the bill was drafted.

DT: Even then.

ST: Yeah.

CC: Why do you think? I mean, you would think that would be their . . .

ST: I don't know. I really don't know. I'm not sure. The administration never said a word in support of that bill. Jack Burns's office never sat anybody down to talk about the bill.

DT: But he did sign it?

ST: Well, yeah, he did sign it, though, but right after he signed it, I got a call from David Trask, who said, "I'm sorry but we overlooked you, inviting you to the signing of the bill." They were all there, you know (chuckles). The union leaders were all there, but they never invited me. They invited everybody else but me to go and observe the signing of the bill.

DT: I was there even (chuckles).

ST: Yeah, I know.

DT: And here's the father of the bill . . .

ST: They all had a picture of you in the newspaper, I think.

DT: Right, right, that's very true. You have a good memory, Senator.

CC: [How] did you view those things? Did you take those things personally or did you chalk that all up as part of the political. . . . How did you. . . .

- ST: Well, I think the reason why I wasn't there is because they didn't want me there.
- CC: Basically, they didn't want you to get more credit than. . . .
- ST: Yeah. Because I was already supporting Tom Gill.
- CC: Okay.
- DT: Well, that was an amazing episode, as far as I'm concerned, in the political annals that I know about. You stood for certain other things, I think, during your tenure in the senate, did you not, Senator? Weren't you interested in the unicameral legislature at one time . . .
- ST: Yeah, that's right.
- DT: . . . and some other forward-looking things, like a year-long legislature and higher salaries for the legislators?
- ST: That's right. I supported---I still support a unicameral legislature. I think it's a good idea. Fred [Frederick] Rohlfing and I really supported that unicameral business. But, those bills never saw the light of day.
- DT: And Nelson Doi, did you have pretty good relations with him? As I recall, he was sort of a unicameralist, wasn't he or. . . .
- ST: Yes, Nelson was a supporter of that bill.
- CC: And also the full-time, year-long session. You thought people should be full-time legislators?
- ST: That's right, yeah.
- CC: What's the---as you see it, just a critique, based on your experience---what's the problem with the setup the way it is now?
- ST: Well, first of all, I don't think that there's enough time to consider. Although within the year you should set target dates, but there's not enough time to really fully consider bills. If you notice the legislative hearings, why, you know, the hearings are very, very cursory in many cases. They should spend more time really enacting and studying bills and enacting good laws. There's a lot of things that could be done very well, but [are] not done.
- CC: You feel there's a problem with a legislator having to really make his living outside of the legislature, I mean, the salary they get as a legislator? I mean you're really forced to---you can't live on the salary they pay for them currently.
- ST: Some of them do, though.
- CC: Some do, but I mean, most of them make most of their money in other ways, right?
- ST: I think they ought to be paid enough so that they'll do a good job. I think the state is big enough and financially strong enough to have a year-long, year-round legislature. But I think

they could also reduce the size of the legislature. We don't---that's why I go for this unicameral business. We don't need fifty-one members in the house and twenty-five members in the senate. I think going back to the territorial legislature days, why, with fifteen senators and thirty house members, we did a pretty good job. And in those days, you know, we were just getting paid \$1,000 for a regular session and \$500 for the short session. These fellows are going to get paid now \$25,000.

DT: (Chuckles) Plus.

CC: They get expenses, too.

DT: Yeah, yeah. At any rate, after, would it be a total of twenty years, I guess, in the legislature, I think you retired voluntarily, didn't you, in '74?

ST: Yes, I decided that I've had enough. I think the time was ripe for me to quit and let some others take my place. I kind of had an understanding with Richard Wong, who's the president of the senate, that when I quit, you run for the senate and that's what he did.

DT: Oh, I see. He moved up from the house to the senate.

ST: Yeah, that's right.

DT: You ran the last time then in 1970?

ST: Nineteen, no, '72 . . .

DT: Seventy-two?

ST: . . . because there was a reapportionment.

DT: Oh, reapportionment so you had a short term?

ST: Yeah, and at that time, I told Richard this is going to be my last time, so you prepare yourself to run for the senate. We got along very well.

DT: One thing we might ask, sort of parenthetical, before we move out of this, and that is, what did you think of Governor Burns's selection, ultimately, of George Ariyoshi to be his successor? Did you have any reaction to that? You'd been [a] colleague of his in the senate for many years?

ST: Well, I don't think he was the best man. I think events have proven itself. In fact, I did make a statement when I quit the senate in 1974 that I felt that this was going to be a custodial arrangement and there wasn't going to be too much done. They didn't like that statement, but that's the way I felt. And it pretty much turned out to be that way.

DT: Yeah.

CC: Even some of the people close to Governor Burns like Dan [Daniel] Aoki weren't that pleased with Ariyoshi.

- ST: Oh, I know that. Dan was not pleased with. . . . My own appraisal of George Ariyoshi's performance is, well, he was an administrator and not a doer.
- DT: And now things have passed from Ariyoshi to [John] Waihee, apparently, Waihee being Ariyoshi's choice.
- ST: Yeah.
- DT: So do you think things will improve or not?
- ST: I liked the moves that the present governor is making. I think he's a little bit more activist-type rather than the type that George Ariyoshi was as governor.
- DT: In other words, more promising but the jury's still out, I guess . . .
- ST: That's right.
- DT: One other thing, if we have the time, Chris.
- CC: Sure, we do.
- DT: Single-member districts, I believe, were created after you left the legislature.
- ST: No, single member districts---well, that's right. That's right, they were . . .
- DT: I still remember the redrawing by the federal courts by Sam King, redrawing them. It seems to me that this has changed the character of our legislature a great deal. Would you feel the same way or do you feel otherwise?
- ST: I do feel the same way as you do. I think it's a mistake to have single-member districts. In the territorial setup, you know, we represented an entire district, large district, and you don't get involved in these real petty things like pork-barrel items that each one has to get for his particular single district. Sometimes a single district has all the things they need, but the fact that they run, a legislator runs from a single district, he's got to bring home some bacon for them, even though they don't need it. And I think that's very wasteful. Secondly, single-member district legislators have a tendency to have a very narrow view of things, rather than take a broad view. What is good for the state, eh, should be good also for the single-member district. So I'm not too happy with that kind of an arrangement.
- CC: What about the changes in politics themselves? The use of the media, the way it's done now. Do you think you lose the real debate and the flavor of things or do you. . . . What's your reaction to that?
- ST: Actually, single-member district candidates don't use the media as much as we used to use it when we ran for larger districts. In fact, some of them don't spend any money on campaigning except go house-to-house canvassing. That's about all they do.
- CC: But in the bigger campaigns, do you feel the public is served well by the mass media or do you think it really minimizes their. . . . People go both ways, you know. We have more

information than ever and others say, well, we get a shallow view.

ST: I think the fact that television, political advertising is so expensive, that we're not getting the benefit of television because people tend to concentrate their advertising in very small, limited spots. I think that public television probably can do a better service to the public by allowing a lot of time for real good debates and discussions on issues of the day.

CC: I'll tell you, we're going to try to do that this year.

(Laughter)

ST: That's more beneficial than the spots that you see on television.

DT: Well, you've had a long and contributory political career, Senator. Is there anything else that you'd like to say about looking back as we have looked back today upon your total, sum total of your interest in politics? Things that you're proudest of, things that you wished had happened, that sort of thing?

ST: Well, I'm very pleased and, oh, the fact that I've had twenty years of service and I feel that during those twenty years, I was able to at least contribute something to the benefit of the people of Hawai'i. I hope that they will look at my record and feel the same way about it, how I feel about my service.

CC: That's good. I think that's at the end of our tape, I think.

DT: We thank you for being with us and . . .

CC: We thank you a lot. I enjoyed it. Okay.

JC: That's the end of the Sakae Takahashi interview.

END OF INTERVIEW

**HAWAI'I
POLITICAL HISTORY
DOCUMENTATION PROJECT**

Volume I

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

June 1996